

## Robert Maitland Beath, B.A., M.B., F.F.R.

DR. Robert Maitland Beath's comparatively early death on 21st November, 1940, was a source of great sorrow to an exceptionally wide circle of friends. That circle embraced, not only hospital colleagues, but members of all branches of the profession and outside it, not only in Northern Ireland, but in Great Britain, the Scandinavian countries, the United States, and Canada. Dr. Beath was a keen student of his speciality, an enthusiastic traveller, and a most companionable man. Contacts formed at congresses and visiting other clinics were never willingly relinquished by those who once made his acquaintance. At his death he was probably one of the best-known British radiologists in the world.

A native of Belfast, he graduated with honours in medicine in the Queen's University in 1914, having previously taken his arts degree in classics in the old Royal University of Ireland. After serving as house surgeon in the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast, he joined the R.A.M.C. in 1915, retiring with the rank of major in 1919. He served in France, in a hospital ship in the Mediterranean, and, finally, at the close of the war, as assistant radiologist to the military surgical hospital at Shepherd's Bush. On returning to Belfast after further post-graduate study in radiology, he commenced practice, and in a few years had acquired, not only a large practice, but a reputation which extended far beyond his own school. His first appointment was to the Ulster Hospital for Children and Women; soon other hospitals, the Royal Victoria, the Belfast Union Infirmary, the Forster Green Hospital for Diseases of the Chest, and the Down Mental Hospital, appointed him to their staffs, and on the establishment of the department of dentistry in the Medical School he was appointed lecturer in dental radiology in the Queen's University.

In spite of the claims of practice and manifold hospital engagements, he found time for many other activities, notably the Ulster Medical Society, of which he had been a most efficient honorary secretary; the B.M.A., to which he rendered outstanding service during the annual meeting in 1937, acting as chairman of the Belfast Division and chairman of the Dinner Committee, imposing tasks discharged with credit to himself and the city. Other activities included the Masonic Order, in which he had held high office, and lately he had given invaluable service as chairman of the Medical War Services Committee. He was peculiarly fitted for this important office. He possessed, in remarkable measure, the confidence of his fellow-practitioners, and his impartiality and fair-mindedness were indisputable. Such are the bare facts of Maitland Beath's career, but they are absolutely inadequate as a picture of a very remarkable man, who was beloved in his own home circle, held in affection by those who had the privilege of intimacy with him; and his acquaintances, be they members of the profession, patients, or the public generally, gave him their ungrudging regard and respect. It is difficult, without seeming exaggeration, to do justice to his character, gifts, and accomplishments, and it is equally difficult to express what his passing means to his friends and colleagues.

He is a striking example of heredity apart from environment. His father died when he was only ten years old, so that the paternal influence, while present at a very important stage of his boyhood, was soon removed. In spite of that, glimpses we have of his father from an old acquaintance and from letters and records, are strongly reminiscent of the son, and it is not without interest to note his father and forbears.

John Beath of Duniface, in Beath Parish, Fifeshire, a substantial farmer, died there in 1690, having originally come from Inverness, and our colleague could trace his descent through six generations to him. The good Scottish names of the female side are striking: Robertson, Flèming, Bonthorne, Christie, Durie, Park, Maitland. The Beaths were a large connection. Many won their livelihood from that most honourable of all occupations, the land. Some were in commerce and some in the Scottish Church. His grandfather, David Beath, was a Greenock merchant with interests in India. He was born in 1778, and his journals, in beautiful handwriting, are an interesting commentary on the conditions of travel over one hundred and thirty years ago.

David Beath married Jane Maitland in 1817, and their first child was born in the Indian Ocean in 1819, but died in infancy in Madras. The next child, Robert Maitland Beath, born 1820, was Dr. Beath's father. Robert Maitland Beath, senior, was by profession a marine engineer, and started his career in the service of the old East India Company in 1844. He came to Belfast in the fifties of the last century as manager of Princes Dock Foundry, resigning from this position in 1861 and becoming consulting engineer and marine superintendent to the Ulster Steamship Company, the Head Line, the old Belfast Steamship Company, and the Antrim Iron Ore Company. He was connected with these firms until his death in 1896. From testimonials, an address from the employees of Princes Dock Foundry accompanying a presentation of mathematical instruments, letters of condolence to Mrs. Beath, sen., on his death, one reads of characteristics plainly discernible in his only son: "Courtesy," "kindness," "consideration for others." Thus the Princes Dock employees in 1861, "the kindness of your amiable disposition, courteousness of manner, the reverse of anything that savoured of haughtiness, and other excellent qualities with which you are endowed." Their gift they describe as "a slight token of our affection." In a letter to Mrs. Beath, the Church Session in 1896 recorded: "Mr. Beath had a large place in the affection of every member of the Session. His uprightness and uniform simplicity of character, his general and kindly bearing towards everyone, his self-forgetfulness, his readiness to sympathise with and aid any in trouble."

Here we see the outstanding characteristics of our late friend: "Courtesy," "reverse of anything that savoured of haughtiness," "uprightness," "uniform simplicity of character," "kindly bearing," "readiness to aid," "a large place in the affections of everyone." Like father, like son.

Mr. R. M. Beath, sen., married as his second wife Miss Annie Hardy of Belfast. Dr. Beath, their only child, was born in 1886. Although dying at 54, his grandfather, his father, and he bridge one hundred and sixty-two years.

It was the writer's privilege to enjoy friendship and intimacy with him for many years, to have travelled with him and his charming wife in Canada and the United States, and to have frequently enjoyed the hospitality of his home in Belfast and his delightful seaside cottage at Ringneill. Nowhere was he more completely happy than in his own family circle, and an evening with the Beaths was something to look forward to, enjoy to the full, and look back on with happy recollections.

From his many trips abroad he brought home cinema records and photographs of men and places. These would be shown and commented on. Like Dr. Johnson, he believed that the more you knew about a place before you visited it, the greater would be your enjoyment of it while there and the more information you would bring back. With an orderly mind, everything was planned well ahead, and this made him an ideal travelling companion. No Cook's courier could have excelled him in forethought or competed with him in the delicate task of keeping the laggards up to time for train or boat.

Well read and critical in his appreciation of books, he always had something interesting to tell, and his judgments on current affairs, the theatre, food and wine at home and abroad, were discerning and shrewd. His technical ability and judgment in his own sphere of work were beyond criticism.

It is as a friend we shall miss him most of all. Good radiologists can be trained—and each generation produces its own experts, but a friend like Robert Maitland Beath is a landmark in a lifetime. It is difficult to focus his many virtues or to say what facet of his character made the greatest appeal. Always quietly cheerful, optimistic, and friendly, he brought courage to the pessimist. Simple, modest, and unassuming, he inspired loyalty and affection. In times of stress or friction he could take an equitable view of men and situations which commanded respect, and ever he thought the best of others. No tinge of acerbity, envy, or malice coloured his actions or his criticisms.

Nothing showed his quality so finely as his last illness. During the early autumn he had experienced disquieting symptoms which, to a man of his knowledge and experience, must have raised doubts, but he betrayed no alarm even to his intimates. Within five weeks of his death he attended a dinner at which many of us met annually, and was his usual self. When within two or three weeks of this the outcome was plainly inevitable, no murmurings escaped him, and he died as he lived: calm, courageous, thoughtful of others, and quietly confident. Without effort he achieved Sir Wm. Osler's criteria for the well-balanced man, "that equanimity which enabled him to bear success with humility, the affection of his friends without pride, and when the day of grief and sorrow came, the courage to meet it like a man."

We who loved him cherish his example and mourn his loss. His funeral service in Elmwood Church was a remarkable and spontaneous tribute from all classes. The Church, law, politics, the medical profession, architecture, the University, the medical school, and his patients were all represented. To Mrs. Beath, his devoted partner, and her daughters the sympathy of an exceptionally large circle is extended.

C. G. L.